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ORATION

BY

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OF PLATTSBURGH, N. Y.,

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

KNIGHTS OF LABOR

OF SARANAC, N. Y.,

JULY 4th, 1887.

FELLOW CITIZENS :—

Again the cold and frosts of winter have come and gone. Again the snow and ice have melted from your fruitful hills and valleys. Spring and summer each with its seed time and growth ; their gentle rains and sunshine have caused your fields to nurture the waving grain. Your meadows, with succulent grass to imitate the green of the leafy forest trees upon your borders. The month of June with its roses sweet has come and gone. The sun has swung back upon the summer solstice, but the fragrance of the rose, still left upon the summer air, mingles with the scent of the new mown hay, while the sound of the songs of the lark and the linnet and the robin echoes on the ear, and all nature thus equipped in the

garb of its rejoicing and fruit-bearing season fulfills the word of Scripture that summer and harvest shall not fail, but greet and usher in this summer month of July, so fateful with the interests of the American people, and through them of the "universe of men."

This month of July, named after the greatest and most successful of military heroes, Julius Cæsar, is indeed a marked one in the American calendar.

First, because in it and upon the 4th day thereof, 111 years ago to-day, was signed an act by a few brave and resolute hands and hearts, which is preserved in the archives of our government and enshrined in the memories of our people.

Second, because we to-day celebrate the doing of that act. It is doubtless unnecessary for me to tell an American audience what that act was. To name as the Declaration of Independence is sufficient to call up in every patriotic mind the event and its significance, to cause every patriotic heart to beat with emotions of gratitude, every bosom to swell and every eye to glisten with the tear of joy as he looks back upon that act and upon our country then and now.

In an upper chamber, in the city of Philadelphia, where those signers of the Declaration of Independence dared to enunciate its principles of true freedom against the tyranny of a despotic government, risking by and pledging in that act their lives, their liberty and their sacred honor, was accomplished in a sense the preservation of the liberties of the peoples of all climes.

The whole civilized world looked on in wonder at what then seemed to be the act of fools or fanatics. This and other acts of the American colonists at-

tracted the favorable attention of all lovers of freedom, and aroused the partisans of tyranny to energetic hatred and opposition. One side was called Patriots, the other Tories.

The Declaration of Independence, coming as it did more than a year after the battles of Lexington, Concord and Bunker Hill, all of which were in the main disastrous to the colonists, showed the indomitable character of the people with whom the Tories had to deal. That upon the issue raised by Patrick Henry, "Give me liberty or give me death," the colonists were determined to stand or fall. Kings, emperors and dynasties stood aghast, while the young American eagle dared to beard the old British lion in his den.

The signers of that instrument, though appreciating the gravity of the situation, were not devoid, even then, of that *sang froid* which carried their compatriots, the Continental army, through many a trying crisis. Here is an instance:

It is said that during the serious debate which ensued on the question of the adoption of the resolutions, one speaker referred in glowing terms to a picture of the sun hanging up behind the President John Hancock's chair, as the "rising sun," when Dr. Franklin rose and said that he was glad to hear that sun spoken of as representing the *rising* sun, for from the gloomy utterances of some of the speakers he had doubted whether it did not represent a setting sun, a witicism which was doubtless well received. Another instance also well illustrates the same idea. When President Hancock rose to speak he said: "We must be unanimous; there must be no pulling different ways; we must all hang together." "Yes," replied Franklin, "we

must all *hang* together or most assuredly we shall *hang separately.*"

With such wit as this, but with set purpose, did these patriots accomplish their design, though they knew too well what their fate would be at the hands of the British Crown, they were determined to be free. The promulgation of the Declaration of Independence, the doctrine till then in the political world almost unknown, that there are certain inalienable rights, such as life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness belonging originally to mankind, and that these colonists of right ought to be, therefore, and are forever free and independent, did not by any means terrify the British government, or deter it from making more strenuous efforts to conquer the colonists, to enslave them, in a word, to reduce them even from the position of British subjects to that of outlaws, and to degrade them to the level of penal colonists, to advertise and publish their leaders, Adams, Hancock, Washington, Carroll, Marion, Franklin, Morris, Livingston and Trumbull, as outlaws and convicts, with a price set on their heads as of escaped and condemned criminals. Your own Ethan Allen, the hero of Ticonderoga, carried in chains to England; your Nathan Hale, denied even the boon of a word of prayer or Scripture, hung in the morning air by the neck until he was dead, with the cry upon his lips: "I only regret that I have but one life to lose for my country."

Washington's headquarters then were where is now in New York city Murray Hill, and he had sent young Hale into the British army as a spy. Disguised as a farmer, he made sketches and notes unsuspected, but a Tory kinsman, Judas that he was, betrayed him, and without even the form of a trial,

Hale was handed over next morning, September 22, 1776, to the Provost Marshal to be hanged. A quick shrift and short rope were the British judgment on spies, and Cunningham, the Provost Marshal, not only refused him the services of a clergyman and the use of a Bible, but when the more humane officer who superintended the execution permitted him to write to his mother, his betrothed and sisters, the brutal Cunningham destroyed these letters before the face of his victim, while tears and sobs marked the sympathy of the spectators. Cunningham gave as a reason that he did not want the — rebels to know how brave a man Hale was, and how willingly and bravely he sacrificed his life on the altar of his country. Hale had been confined in the green house of the Beekman mansion in New York, then Lord Howe's headquarters, and tradition says he might have escaped, but he had given his word he would not, so true a Bayard, indeed, *sans peur sans reproch*, this fair-haired boy, for he was nothing else, having just passed his 21st year, was swung into eternity almost in sight of the Connecticut home he had shortly left at the call of his country.

His execution was justified as a measure of military necessity, but the brutal Cunningham, who starved, persecuted and murdered American prisoners in the city of New York, who sold the rations of 2,000 of them, who consequently starved to death, and who privately hung more than 250 of them without trial to gratify his cruel appetite, met his own just deserts from the very government which he served, for he himself was executed in England for forgery August 10th, 1791. Thus was accomplished the divine edict, "With what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged." To-day, then, we celebrate the

labors, the sacrifices of the Revolutionary patriots. The war they waged from April 19, 1775, begun at Lexington, where "the shot was fired heard round the world," to Yorktown, October 10th, 1781, when the army, under Cornwallis, surrendered to the American arms, had been fought against innumerable odds, difficulties and sacrifices of blood and treasure. All over the thirteen colonies, from Maine to Florida, were patriots like Hale, ready, willing and doing for the rights of country and of man.

Peace and independence were won at last. The seven years of war, with its Lexington, Bunker Hill, Brandy Wine, Valley Forge, Saratoga, Eutaw Springs, Monmouth, Princeton and Yorktown, was over at last. The war had ended. Independence achieved, what next? To solidify all the constituent parts of the colonies into one harmonious political whole, turn the sword into a plowshare and the spear into a pruning hook. The "piping times of peace" had come, and now the question rose what to do in them, and the answer came quick from the people, "make us a nation, give us a union of states," and thus was formed the United States. Oppression first, necessity afterwards, made us a nation.

In 1794 and again in 1818, with some changes, Congress adopted the flag which now represents our government, its sovereignty and power. This beautiful banner became very dear to the hearts of the people after the publication of that national song, commencing :

Oh, say, can you see by the dawn's early light,
What so proudly we hailed at the twilight's last gleaming,
Whose broad stripes and bright stars through the clouds of
the fight,
O'er the ramparts we watched were so gallantly streaming?

And the rocket's red glare, the bomb bursting in air,
Gave proof thro' the night that our flag was still there.
O, say, does that star spangled banner yet wave
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave ?

This song, written by Francis Barton Key, in the midst of the bombardment of Fort McHenry in the second war for independence (1814) represented then the feelings of the Americans when their flag was under fire, and so flying from every flag staff to-day after more than a century of toil, war and progress, after four great wars, we answer the question with :

The star spangled banner—oh, yes, it still waves
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave.

Fellow citizens, knights of labor, it is for you and such as you to still echo that answer, and it ever “*shall* wave o'er the home of the free.” Profiting by the lessons of the past, you may keep your country free. There are many ways of enslaving men other than by wars. And these other ways are generally from within; come from unadjusted balances in the individual and body politic. A people which has grown from three millions to sixty millions in a century, which has converted howling and pathless wildernesses into great commercial highways, and created towns, villages and cities wherever there seemed to be a spot for them, whose territory is so large that you set it down in the Atlantic Ocean and it will fill it up from shore to shore and making a land bridge from eastern to western continent, whose breadth is nearly equal to one-eighth the circumference of the globe, or to more than one-third of the diameter of the earth, whose teeming millions demand and need every comfort of civilized life, it is not strange that the attempt to solve some of the problems resulting from our mode of life, has tested the judgment and talent of our people to the utmost.

There has been, ever since the foundation of civilized society, a constant struggle of the masses with

the few who had, or seemed to have, obtained the control of affairs, to the detriment of the former. It is impossible in a speech of this brevity to give anything like even an epitome of that first, last and all the time great, ever-living and irrepressible struggle for independence by the wage earner from the thraldom of the wage payer.

The great natural principle underlying all business dealings of this life is, "Get all you can and keep all you've got." Hence, as there must be two parties to every contract, the wage earner and the wage payer pull each the opposite way.

The laborer, when he comes to the cashier's desk and receives his pay, turns away, and in nine cases out of ten says, "That's mighty small pay," while the employer in the rear of the office says to himself as he orders it paid out, "That's good pay, more than I can afford and more than he's worth." What is the result? Friction. Bye and bye the laborer says he can't work so cheap, must have more pay, can't work so long, either, must have less hours. Employer says can't give any more, and you must work longer hours instead of fewer; laborers rise up *en masse* and say no. Employers say no, too. Then you've got a lock out and a strike.

Every country in the world has had its labor troubles, and will have so long as the curse of Eden remains in force, viz: that man shall earn his bread by the sweat of his face, and when we consider that *that* condition was not imposed by rich men or poor men, either, but by the Almighty Himself, we may as well make up our minds that for us it is unalterable. But there is no badge of *servitude* or contempt attached to the so-called curse of the ground for our sakes. No *starving* attached to it; only

this: In the sweat of thy face shall thou eat bread until thou return unto the ground, for out of it wast thou taken; and so far as the memory of man runneth not to the contrary. That curse has rested pretty solidly upon all mankind ever since.

Now, there is nothing debasing in this; nothing except a condition imposed upon *all* men alike by the Almighty. There is no chattel mortgage in this on bodies and souls of laborers; no store orders for pay; no class favored more than another; no tyranny of man over man in this; nothing except these two conditions—bread and sweat. All men shall earn. Their wages shall be bread; the conditions shall be sweat. In other words, that while they have *got* to work they shall be duly recompensed.

That bread, by which is meant everything necessary for man in the age in which he lives, shall *be there*—shall be his—earned, however, by honest *toil*. Not by speculation, not by hoarding up millions obtained by dishonest issues of watered stock, but by labor—honest toil.

I am not a Knight of Labor. Indeed, I am barred from becoming one by the rules of your order, which classes lawyers with rum-sellers, bankers, professional gamblers and a precious lot of stock brokers. Lawyers always have to carry the sins of others. I am a laborer, nevertheless, in every sense of the word, and earn my bread by the sweat not only of my face, but of my whole body. I know something of what hard labor is—how exhausting. Hour after hour I have toiled in the hot sun ploughing, sowing, haying and harvesting on the prairies of Wisconsin. Day in, day out, when necessary, have I sawed and split wood for a great farm house and for my father's house. Week after week have I

Hung between the surface of the earth and its bowels in some deep shaft, while I adjusted to a delicate balance the force pumps running down them. Miles of iron pipe have I cut and threaded. Many and many a time have I come forth begrimed with dust, dirt, mud and grease, like the laborer I was. Gentlemen, my life then was one of hard, manual labor. Why did I do it? Because it was honest and dignified, and I was obliged to earn my living and educate my head while I supported my body.

I have lived on six dollars a week and paid four of it out for board and saved the other two until I had got together enough to buy my first installment of \$50 worth of law books, and that, gentlemen, was only in 1874. So you see I have been and am really one of you, although I have the honor (which, however, your by-laws seem to think otherwise) to have been admitted the bar of the State of New York.

Men talk about eight hours labor. I have always worked from twelve to fourteen hours and sometimes the twenty-four hours through. Therefore I say that so far as occupation goes, I am a Knight of Labor.

The panacea, gentlemen, for the woes of humanity, is not so much less hours of labor and more pay, however desirable they may be, but more *thrift* and temperance among the masses and less extravagance among the wealthy. Men have invented many expedients and loaded, so to speak, onto the sweat of the face, which we must carry always, "many devices" to make the sweat bitter, to make it grimy, yea, even scalding in many instances to the laborer. So that in the words of Holy Writ, "the voice of the laborer crieth out from the ground."

Since the Great Laborer for the welfare of men,

The carpenter of Judea, preached to the listening multitudes the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of men, slowly but surely men have been learning the sublime truth that the true Knight, be he of labor or any other order, is the one who does by his neighbor as he would be done by, and that this is the key to true individual and national independence.

As much as I would like to, I cannot talk to you to-day of the industrial aspects of the labor question. I cannot discuss to-day the rights and wrongs of society. It is too great a subject to be handled in one short hour. Neither can I believe that we in this, our day and generation, have solved the problem which has puzzled the wisest heads of all nations. That problem is the true relation of labor and capital. The unbalanced part of it is that in the beginning of a commercial venture capital takes all the risks of profit and loss and labor none. It is this which has made capital so exacting and at times unjust. On the other hand, the laborer enables the capitalist to employ his capital and make profit on it. Therefore, it looks as if that obligation was about balanced.

Our own country, in the 111 years of its existence, has grown in every possible way, except that the growth of religion has not kept pace with the development in other directions.

In 1800, the population of the United States was 5,300,000; to-day it is 60,000,000. In 1800 the church-going and non-church-going people were about as three to one. To-day the non-church-members number twice as many as the church members, *i. e.*, the church of all denominations, so-called, Protestant and Romanist, numbers about 20,000,000, while the non-church members number

about 40,000,000. In other respects the country has advanced with gigantic strides. From being the largest importing, it has become the largest exporting nation.

We have sold our goods and taken somebody else's money in exchange. We sold goods to the enormous amount of \$840,000,000, or about \$14 to every man, woman and child. In the census of 1880 the leading farm products of the United States were:

Milk.....	Over 500,000,000	pounds
Butter.....	" 700,000,000	"
Cheese.....	" 27,000,000	"
Hay.....	" 35,000,000	tons
Hops.....	" 26,000,000	pounds
Rice.....	" 110,000,000	"
Potatoes.....	" 169,000,000	bushels

By the same census 2,738,930 mechanical hands were employed in that year to whom were paid nearly one billion of dollars in wages. The value of manufacturing products, five billions of dollars. The total number of persons engaged in business was 17,392,000, or more than three times the whole population in 1880, of which 7,600,000 were engaged in agriculture; professional, 4,000,000; manufacturing, mechanics and mining, 3,800,000; and trade and transportation, 1,800,000.

The average wealth per inhabitant was in 1884 \$930; with a saving by each of only seven cents per day, amounts every day to more than \$4,000,-000. It is a singular fact brought out by statistics that in two countries so closely allied as Europe and the United States, the daily excess of births over deaths is 11,000, but fortunately there is laid aside to meet this increase of population \$11,000,000 daily or \$1,000 for each, which is about the average salary

ef the professional man. The amount every man is to be capable of earning, viz: \$600, or that the capital represented by his body and brains is \$10,000, and average earnings are six per cent, of that sum; so that you represent \$10,000 of capital.

The total wealth of the United States is equal to more than fifty billions of dollars. Have you any idea what an enormous sum this is? You cannot count even one billion. If Adam had counted continuously from his creation to the present day he would not have reached that, for it would take him nearly 10,000 years, and fifty billions would take fifty times that or ten thousand times fifty—five hundred thousand years. And long before that you and I hope to get where dollars are not the only currency or criterion of success.

The United States spends yearly for liquor \$900,-000,000; bread, \$505,000,000; meat, \$303,-000,000; iron and steel, \$290,000,000; woolen goods, \$237,000,000; sawed lumber, \$233,000,000; cotton goods, \$210,000,000; boots and shoes, \$196,000,000; sugar and molasses, \$155,000,000; public education, \$66,000,000; Christian missions, home and foreign, \$5,500,000. So you see that the people of the United States look after their own material comfort pretty well, and let the good Lord take care of the missionary with the small balance.

Nine hundred millions of dollars for whiskey! Five and and a half millions for religion, or about \$180 for whiskey to \$1 for religion.

Gentlemen, does not this look as if in spite of our material progress there is something “rotten in Denmark?” Is it possible that the billions of wheels of commerce and industry have to be lubricated by liquor? I leave the men who buy and use

it to answer ; but if I were a Knight of Labor as I am an American citizen, in the words of your own grand master workman, Mr. Powderly, I would "Shun the door of the saloon as I would the door of hell."

In spite of our apparent prosperity there have sprung up abuses which *must* be remedied. From a small neighborhood mill or shop has come the vast Catalan forge ; from a single loom or spinning wheel in the old-fashioned farmer's kitchen have come the great cotton factories and mills of to-day ; from the old stage and packet lines, the combined efforts of men, resultant in the railroads and the steamship.

It is an age of corporations, when men all over the world, under cover of laws which they themselves have assisted or have paid to have passed in their favor, have endeavored and are now endeavoring to decry the dignity of honest toil, and the doctrine that the laborer is worthy of his hire. In other words, capital in some instances seems combined against labor. What is the result? Labor must combine against capital. How? By lawful and peaceable methods.

That's what I believe you Knights mean to do, and let me say right here that as the vast majority of laborers are Romanists, none of them need object to join the Knights of Labor. The Roman Catholic Church has set its seal of approval upon your order. You intend that while you respect the rights of capital, it shall also respect *yours*, and I for one and all my friends will help you in such laudable efforts. So far as I have studied your public orders and demonstrations your Knights do not desire to tear down the fabric of society, but to build it stronger by bettering the con-

dition of the laborer and his family, by making honest toil and manual labor the *position of honor*. By making it so honorable and elevating that such silly twaddle describing northern labor, as was uttered by people supported by the unpaid bloody toil of *slave* labor, as "greasy mudsills" can be heard no more forever on the earth. Now, how are you fitted for your work? How was it with the Knight of old? What were the conditions of his knighthood? To be the true knight an old author says: "Defend him from pride and the other deadly sins of anger, envy, sloth and gluttony, and render it impossible that his conduct should ever be stained with the vice of incontinence." The literal meaning of chevalier, or knight, "is a horse rider, or one who rides above the people," significant of his high mission and lofty purpose and impregnable position. Why, the ancient armed Knight could ride through a whole army of footmen unharmed. Their mission was to protect the weak and defenceless; to see that the peasant soldier or vassal had his rights as against the tyranny of his lord—a fit type of occupation and your duty to-day.

In the middle ages these knights errantry were a necessary part of the people, but as society advanced, the power of the great nobles and feudatories declined and chivalry almost died out; but the people became greater. Just so will it be now. Under the wise, protecting care of you, Sir Knights, wherever your white plumes are waving may society be advanced. May the men who count labor as nothing and the laborer as less, *diminish* by geometrical progression, and the honest laborer, whether of the ditch, the farm, the forge, the desk or road, shall fulfill in every sense that sentence in the Declara-

tion of Independence, that all men (not great I, big I, and little you) but *all* men are created *free and equal*.

The history of nations teaches us that there is *no* freedom where *equality is not*. The accumulation of vast stores of wealth in the hands of a few Cæsars in ancient Rome caused the consequent poverty, and *vicious idleness* of its laborers, and its subsequent overthrow.

Cicero, the Roman orator, who attempted single-handed to reform the State and cut off the abuses which had crept in, said: "Justice consists in doing injury to no man," for which, however, he paid with his life, being put to death by a band of assassins which was hired by the combined wealth of the triumvirate to do the horrid deed.

Knights of freedom in all ages have had to do battle, been obliged to endure hardships. But the right will triumph in the end. You do right to lawfully combine for your common protection and improvement. The American people in this year of grace, 1887, and of our Independence the one hundred and twelfth, have woke up to the fact that the laws of a country must be radically wrong where it is impossible without let or hindrance in less than a century to so manipulate the sources of trade and the avenues of industry that the results, less the meager pay of the laborer, are the colossal fortunes of the Vanderbilts, \$200,000,000, Goulds, \$104,000,-000, Mackays, \$90,000,000, Stewarts, \$80,000,000, Astors, \$50,000,000. Why the wealth of these five men alone amounts to the enormous sum of five hundred and twenty-four millions of dollars, or more than half a billion of dollars.

The people see that our cities, villages and towns,

teeming with toiling millions, *are the result* of the labor of those millions ; that the accumulation of such immense fortunes in so short a time, means that the labor, which is the base of all this civilization, has been inadequately *paid*. That these tremendous millions are really the *profits* of these capitalists on the labor of America's poorer sons. And they say to-day it is not right. It shall be no longer. *That men* all over this broad land shall be *paid*, and paid adequately for their labor. The only question remaining is how to do it. The people are with you. You have won their *sympathy*. Now win their votes, by which, and by which only, will you be able to celebrate bye and bye through patient continuance in well-doing, that coming independence day of the toilers of the land.

That day is sure to come. A few years ago a prominent railroad official, when in Plattsburgh, was reported to have said when conversing about cutting down the men's pay : "We propose to pay our men just enough wages so they can keep body and soul together, and do us a good, long day's work, and if you see any laborer getting well off in our employ, let us know." What that meant you can judge as well as I.

Knights of Labor of Saranac, much is committed to your trust. Remember the lessons of history that no good cause has ever thrived by violence and anarchy, nor by passive acquiescence, incurable evils, and that the peaceful method of educating the people to unite with you is the surest and quickest way in the end of accomplishing your design. Then you can pass laws and enforce them which shall greatly assist in the good work of elevating the condition of the laborer. The time now is that a board of rail-

road directors can build a magnificent rolling palace car out of the *earnings* of their laborers for the directors exclusive use once or twice a year, and then dock the hands 10 cents or 25 cents per day on account of the hard times.

I say that when such and worse injustice can no longer be done; when the profits of labor are no longer spent on the one hand by the capitalist in such useless show, nor on the other hand by the laborer for selfish gratification of depraved appetites; when capitalists shall be allowed a fair interest on the money invested, the expenses of the business paid, then the profits divided up among the lawful earners of it—then and not till then can we call our land the Eldorado of the laborer or the home of the free. The common people, the horny-handed son of toil, the poor student and a legal protective tariff have made America what she is. Better the condition of the multitude, and you better the condition of all.

Now, as citizens of our common country, let us in the beautiful and appropriate verse of Longfellow :

Then be up and doing,
With a heart for any fate;
Still achieving, still pursuing,
Learn to labor and to wait.

And with these Stars and Stripes floating above us, vow eternal vigilance to the cause of liberty and elevated labor, which is the prosperity of the people.

One word more and I am done. Great are the toils of the laborer; many are his sacrifices and hardships; but they are not chiefly for his experience here. Glorious as is the birthright of an

American citizen, a boon not to be despised, there is another citizenship for which all these labors and toils are really fitting you beyond this life, prepared for you by the Supreme Architect, Builder and Laborer, the Grand Master Workman of the universe, who bids you strive for that citizenship in that land awaiting us all beyond the grave, who encourages you to persevere in every grand work—to labor not so much for the meat that perisheth, but rather for that which cometh down from Heaven. And He stands now at the head of the centuries, His voice echoing adown the aisles of the ages, proclaiming success and everlasting rest to him when life shall end, and “to him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life in the midst of the paradise of God.”

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